

WASHER THE RACCOON





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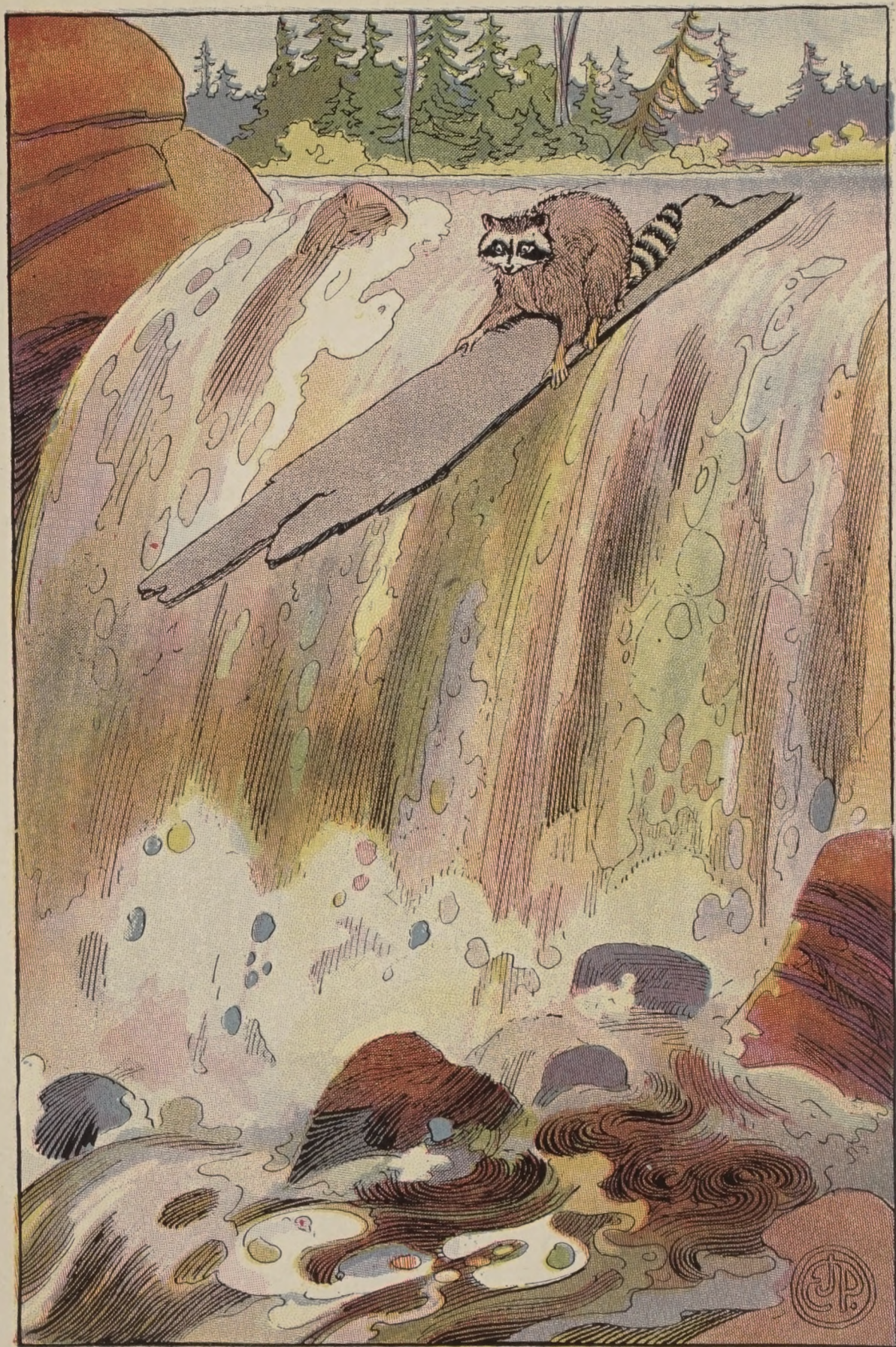
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HIS BOARD WAS RAISED ON THE CREST OF A WAVE AND THEN
TOSSED OVER THE FALLS

Twilight Animal Series

WASHER THE RACCOON

By

GEORGE ETHELBERT WALSH

Author of "Bumper the White Rabbit," "Bumper the White Rabbit in the Woods," "Bumper the White Rabbit and His Foes," "Bumper the White Rabbit and His Friends," "Bobby Gray Squirrel," "Bobby Gray Squirrel's Adventures," Etc.

Colored Illustrations by
EDWIN JOHN PRITTIE



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TWILIGHT ANIMAL SERIES FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

FROM 4 TO 10 YEARS OF AGE

By
GEORGE ETHELBERT WALSH

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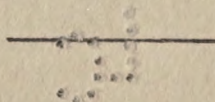
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- 2 BUMPER THE WHITE RABBIT IN THE WOODS
- 3 BUMPER THE WHITE RABBIT AND HIS FOES
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(Other titles in preparation)

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INTRODUCTION TO THE TWILIGHT ANIMAL STORIES

BY THE AUTHOR

All little boys and girls who love animals should become acquainted with Bumper the white rabbit, with Bobby Gray Squirrel, with Buster the bear, and with White Tail the deer, for they are all a jolly lot, brave and fearless in danger, and so lovable that you won't lay down any one of the books without saying wistfully, "I almost wish I had them really and truly as friends and not just story-book acquaintances." That, of course, is a splendid wish; but none of us could afford to have a big menagerie of wild animals, and that's just what you would have to do if you went outside of the books. Bumper had many friends, such as Mr. Blind Rabbit, Fuzzy Wuzz and Goggle Eyes, his country cousins; and Bobby Gray Squirrel had his near cousins, Stripe the chipmunk and Webb the flying squirrel; while Buster and White Tail were favored with an endless number of friends and relatives. If we turned them all loose from the books, and put them in a ten-acre lot—but

INTRODUCTION

no, ten acres wouldn't be big enough to accommodate them, perhaps not a hundred acres.

So we will leave them just where they are—in the books—and read about them, and let our imaginations take us to them where we can see them playing, skipping, singing, and sometimes fighting, and if we read very carefully, and *think* as we go along, we may come to know them even better than if we went out hunting for them.

Another thing we should remember. By leaving them in the books, hundreds and thousands of other boys and girls can enjoy them, too, sharing with us the pleasures of the imagination, which after all is one of the greatest things in the world. In gathering them together in a real menagerie, we would be selfish both to Bumper, Bobby, Buster, White Tail and their friends as well as to thousands of other little readers who could not share them with us. So these books of Twilight Animal Stories are dedicated to all little boys and girls who love wild animals. All others are forbidden to read them! They wouldn't understand them if they did.

So come out into the woods with me, and let us listen and watch, and I promise you it will be worth while.

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WASHER THE RACCOON

STORY ONE

WASHER'S FIRST ADVENTURE

Washer was the youngest of a family of three Raccoons, born in the woods close to the shores of Beaver Pond, and not half a mile from Rocky Falls where the water, as you know, turns into silvery spray that sparkles in the sun-shine like diamonds and rubies. And, indeed, the animals and birds of the North Woods much prefer this glittering spray and foam that rise in a steady cloud from the bottom of the falls to all the jewels and gems ever dug out of the earth! For, though each drop sparkles but a moment, and then vanishes from sight, there are a million others to follow it, and when you bathe in them they wash and scour away the dirt, and make you clean and fresh in body and soul.

Washer had his first great adventure at Rocky Falls, and it is a wonder that he ever lived to tell the tale, for the water which flows over the falls is almost as cruel and terrible as it is sparkling and inviting. But

Washer knew nothing of this then, for he was a very young Raccoon, and not quite responsible for all he did. Perhaps it was Mother Raccoon that was to blame, for it was her duty to look after her little ones until they were old enough to hunt for themselves. It is a law of the woods that any mother of bird or animal who neglects its young shall be punished.

The nature of the punishment has never been told, but in the case of Washer's mother you can easily guess what it was. It was an uneasy conscience that her neglect had caused her child's death, and she would never see him again.

But Washer apparently had as many lives as a cat, for he was not killed, and he lived long after his mother had given up all hopes of ever seeing him again. No one—certainly no Raccoon—had ever gone over Rocky Falls, and been heard of afterward. Therefore, Washer was dead. Mother Raccoon believed that, and reported the sad news to all her family and friends.

It was a bright, sunny day. Washer had been playing near the edge of the river above the falls with his two brothers—playing very much as three boys or three girls would do if let loose in the woods. They were only baby Raccoons, and could not run very fast, and

every time they dipped a paw in the water they squealed and made a great noise.

It was perfectly safe near the shore, for a big tree blown down by the wind cut off the swift current of the river and formed a little back eddy. Mother Raccoon had told them they could wade around in the shoal water, but she didn't say anything about not going in anywhere else.

Washer did not think he was doing anything wrong, therefore, when growing tired of wading he crawled far out on the end of the big tree lying on its side to watch the swift current flowing by. Pieces of driftwood, twigs, knots and sticks of wood of all sizes passed him in an endless procession. He snatched at some of these with his paws, and caught one or two.

Each time he was successful, he squealed with delight. Of course, he grew bolder and more reckless until finally he stood on the end of the very last branch of the fallen tree. From there he could reach more sticks floating down stream. One particularly big one attracted his attention. It was a little further out than the others, but Washer was sure he could reach it.

But he missed it by an inch, and the force of the blow with his paw at the stick unbalanced him. He clutched frantically at the

tree branch. It broke off close to the trunk, and Washer toppled over into the deep, dark stream.

When he came up to the surface, he squealed as loud as he could: "Help! Help!"

His two brothers playing inshore heard the cry, but they thought it was one of Washer's tricks, and they paid no attention to it. But Mother Raccoon, who had been dozing in the bushes, was quick to note the cry of alarm, and she sprang up a stump to look around.

She had just one last glimpse of Washer. He was in the river, struggling to crawl upon the big board that had caused his mishap. Then board and Raccoon disappeared in the smother of the rapids, which began just above the falls.

Mother Raccoon ran frantically along the banks of the river, calling to Washer, but she knew there was no help for him. Nothing that she could do would rescue him from the terrible adventure ahead.

Washer himself was more surprised than frightened at first. He was not exactly afraid of the water, and the ducking didn't bother him; but when he managed to climb upon the board and looked around he began to feel more frightened than surprised. His frail boat was being twisted and whirled around like a top, making him dizzy; the shore was

rushing past him, and all about him was foam and spray that sparkled and glittered in the sun-light. But just then Washer wasn't much interested in things that glistened.

He saw the top of the falls ahead. Toward that he was being hurried, and the further he drifted the rougher grew the waters. His board pitched and tossed, making it difficult for the baby Raccoon to cling to it.

Washer was frightened, and in his fear he called loudly for his mother; but the roar of the falls ahead drowned his voice.

It all happened quickly, and the end came before Washer could call many times for his mother. His board was raised on the crest of a wave, and then tossed over the falls, with Washer clinging desperately to it.

Down, down, they went together, the water blinding and suffocating him. It seemed as if the falls were miles and miles high, and that he would never reach the river below. Of course, they were not as many feet high as Washer mistook for miles. But it was high enough to kill or drown most animals who went over the precipice.

It is hard to say just what saved Washer. Perhaps it was because he was tougher than most Raccoons, or because he clung to the board and when it bobbed up to the surface it had to bring him up with it. Anyway,

Washer finally got the spray out of his eyes, and found himself floating down the lower river with the falls behind him.

He had taken the dip of death, and survived it. He was out of all immediate danger. For the first time then he had eyes to admire the sparkling mist and spray rising like a million diamonds from the top and bottom of the falls.

"I must get ashore now, and dry myself," he said to himself. "I was never so wet in all my life."

He began paddling with his front paws, and in this way gradually directed his raft toward the shore. When he was near enough he took a flying leap and landed on a log and clung to it.

But he was in a strange country, and far from home, and he began to be afraid again. Just when he thought he would break down and cry, he heard a sniffing noise in the bushes, and looking up he found himself face to face with a big, shaggy animal, whose fierce, glaring eyes sent the shivers all through him. It was Sneaky the Wolf, who had been watching him land, and in the next story you will hear of what Sneaky did to him.

STORY TWO

WASHER IS CARRIED TO THE WOLF'S DEN

Washer felt his little heart throb at the sight of the yellow eyes watching him, and the shaggy body of Sneaky seemed bigger than that of any animal he had ever dreamed of in the North Woods. Washer gave a frenzied little squeak, and tried to hop back upon his raft; but he did not get far. Sneaky pounced down upon him, and the double row of white teeth closed upon his back and scruff of the neck.

"Oh, please — please, don't kill me!" shrieked Washer, almost fainting from fear.

But Sneaky paid no attention to his appeal. The powerful jaws held him a prisoner. Every moment Washer expected they would close tighter and crunch his bones.

But apparently the Wolf had no idea of killing him right away. Washer, young as he was, knew that many of the wild animals of the woods teased and tortured their victims before killing them. Some of his own people had been guilty of this very cruelty. Washer, knowing now how it felt, decided that if he ever escaped he would never torture any one — no, never, not as long as he lived!

Sneaky picked him up in his mouth, and began trotting away through the bushes, carrying Washer as easily as a cat carries its kittens. The jaws of the Wolf were closed uncomfortably tight on his neck, but after all they did not actually hurt the poor little Raccoon. The sharp, white teeth did not go through his thick fur and tough skin.

For a long time Sneaky trotted along in a mechanical lope, never once opening his mouth to speak, although Washer kept pleading with him, hoping that he would loosen his hold on his neck the minute he opened his mouth to say a word. Sneaky was too wise for that, for no Wolf can talk and still keep his mouth closed. He can growl and grumble, but not actually talk.

They passed through the thickest part of the woods, and then began climbing a rough trail among the rocks and stones. Then they came to a brook, which Sneaky crossed by jumping from stone to stone, and after that the Wolf followed a path that lead to the mouth of a cave.

When Washer saw this he opened his mouth in a series of pitiful cries, for he knew this was the entrance to the Wolf's den. He could tell this by the peculiar smell of the place. The air was filled with odors that made the baby Raccoon hold his breath.

But Sneaky was still silent and dumb. He trotted through the entrance and disappeared in the darkness of the cave. At first Washer could see nothing, but then gradually his eyes grew accustomed to the place, and his last hope vanished when he saw another Wolf almost as big as Sneaky and three little cubs playing at her feet.

"What have you here, Sneaky?" Mother Wolf growled when her lordly mate appeared.

Sneaky deposited Washer at the foot of Mother Wolf, and spoke for the first time. "A nice little dinner for you and the children," he said. "I brought him home alive so you could show the babies how to kill. It will be great sport watching them."

At the sound of his voice, Washer made a desperate effort to escape, but Sneaky's paw came down on his back and held him.

"He's a lively little Raccoon," Sneaky remarked, grinning so his white teeth showed.

Mother Wolf looked at Washer, turned him over with a paw, and sniffed at him. Then she raised her head and looked at her mate. "He's only a baby Raccoon," she said. "Where'd you find the nest? And what did you do with the others? Ate them up, I suppose! That's why you're so generous in bringing this one home to us."

Washer thought there was a look of disgust in the eyes and voice, and Sneaky evidently thought so, too, for he looked a little crestfallen, and then said: "No, I didn't find his nest. He was floating down the river on a board, and when he landed I caught him."

Mother Wolf sniffed again, and looked a little incredulous. She turned Washer over again. "He's a mere baby," she murmured, "not much older than our dear little ones."

"Yes, and he'll be sweet and tender," added Sneaky, stretching himself. "It won't hurt our children to eat part of him after they've killed him."

Mother Wolf did not seem anxious to kill Washer, nor was she ready to teach her little ones to kill. "We won't kill him today," she said finally. "My little ones are well fed, and they couldn't eat more without hurting them. We will keep him until tomorrow."

Sneaky was a little hurt at this remark, for he had planned to help with the feast when the others had eaten all they wanted, and he growled disconsolately: "What'll we do with him over night? He'll try to escape from us when we're asleep."

"Put him in with the children, and I'll watch him," replied Mother Wolf. "I never sleep with both eyes shut."

Mother Wolf was boss of the den, for

Sneaky grumblyingly picked up Washer once more and carried him into the darkest corner of the cave and dropped him down among the little sleeping cubs. Their warm bodies felt good to Washer, and he crawled up close to them. He knew that he would not be killed until the next day, and he was very tired and sleepy.

Within ten minutes he was sleeping as soundly as the Wolf cubs, snuggling close up to them with his little body half buried from sight by the legs and paws of his strange bed fellows. He did not know that once or twice in the night time, Mother Wolf came over and looked down at him, with a very, very queer expression in her eyes. Each time, she walked away, grumbling to herself: "He's only a baby—a little baby."

It was morning before Washer opened his eyes, although it was so dark in the cave he could not tell that the sun was shining outside. Sneaky and Mother Wolf were still sleeping, snoring away so that the den was filled with queer echoes. But if the parents were asleep, the three little Wolf cubs were wide awake. They were rolling and tumbling over each other, pulling and hauling each other's tails, and pretending to bite and scratch. Before Washer realized it he was being hugged and squeezed and jerked

around as if he was a baby wolf, and not a baby Raccoon.

Of course, his first idea was to snap and bite at the cubs, but on second thought he decided, not to. If he hurt one of them Sneaky or Mother Wolf would pounce upon him and kill him in a flash. No, he had to play carefully with his bed-fellows.

They were soft, warm little bodies rolling all over him, and they never scratched or bit, but merely pretended to. Washer took care that he was as gentle, and pretty soon he was so absorbed in the play that he forgot they were his enemies.

Suddenly he looked up, and saw Mother Wolf standing over him. She had been watching him for some time. Fearful lest she had come to kill him, he doubled up in a ball and began to shake and tremble. From another corner, Sneaky yawned and came forth to look at the cubs. Mother Wolf turned to him.

"He's very playful," she said. "I don't think I'll kill him today. You must go out and get me something else to eat."

Sneaky growled his disapproval, but obeyed, and the minute he was gone Washer felt all his fear vanish. What happened in the cave next will appear in the following story.

STORY THREE

MOTHER WOLF TAKES A HAND

Washer was very lonely without his mother or brothers, and very homesick; but the little wolves were so playful they gave him little time to think of his worry. Whenever he curled up in a corner to mope and sigh, one of the cubs was sure to creep up behind and roll all over him. Sometimes they got so mixed up that it was difficult for Mother Wolf to tell her own children from the raccoon.

Meanwhile, Sneaky had been out hunting, and returned with food for his family. He flung it to the little cubs, and said:

"Eat, little ones, and may it make you strong and stout of heart like your father!"

He gave none to Washer, but Mother Wolf stepped in and divided the food evenly. "Here, Little Stranger of the woods, you must eat too, or you'll grow thin and die."

Sneaky did not like this, and displayed his sharp, cruel teeth. "Why should a stranger rob my children of their food?" he asked. "I do not hunt for another's brat."

"If he doesn't eat," replied Mother Wolf,

smiling, "How can he grow fat? Our children must have their food rich and juicy."

Sneaky grinned at this retort, for it was quite true that all wolves liked fat little animals. It made the meat so much more delicious. He was content to hunt food for Washer if it fattened him up for the cubs.

Every day when he returned to his den, he would ask: "Isn't the Little Stranger fat enough to kill today?"

And always Mother Wolf would reply: "Not today. We must wait another day."

Of course, all this conversation worried and frightened Washer, for he knew that in a short time he would be killed to make food for his playmates. It sickened and terrified him so that he finally decided to make the effort to escape from the cave. He had been so gentle, and appeared so contented, that he was given more liberty each day. When the cubs played in front of the cave, Washer was permitted to go there with them.

This gave him an idea. One day when Sneaky was away in the woods hunting, and Mother Wolf was sleeping in front of the cave, Washer suggested to the cubs that they play hide and seek in the bushes. This was great sport, and they began scampering around behind the bushes to hide.

When it came Washer's turn to hide, he ran

further away from the mouth of the cave than at any time before. He looked around him, and saw that a deep ravine was just beyond his hiding place.

"Now is my chance," he said to himself. "If I can escape into that ravine, they'll never catch me. I can hide until night, and then journey far into the woods."

He had no sooner decided upon this than he began scampering for the edge of the ravine. If he once reached the edge of the cliff, he could roll down it, and then hide at the bottom until dark.

He could hear the cubs calling him, but he paid no attention to them. Liberty was ahead, and he ran with all his might. His legs were short and weak, and he could not make as good time as he wished. He stumbled once or twice and rolled over and over. But he was on his feet again, running for dear life, before you could count ten.

Tired and panting, he finally reached the edge of the ravine. When he looked down it, he was a little frightened. It was terribly steep and the bottom a long way off.

"I wonder if it will hurt me," he murmured aloud. "I might run around it, and not fall in it."

Just when he had made up his mind to do this there was a noise in the bushes behind

him, and through the air came Mother Wolf, loping along at a tremendous speed. Washer ducked his head, and tried to hide, but Mother Wolf had seen him. A big paw came down on his back and flattened him to the earth.

"Where are you going, Little Stranger?" the Wolf asked. "Why are you running away from us?"

Now Washer's first thought was to deny that he was running away, but he knew that it was useless to try to deceive Mother Wolf. He realized now that she had been watching him out of the corners of her eyes all the time. She had not been asleep at all. So Washer decided to tell the truth.

"I didn't want to be killed," he said. "I'm growing fatter every day, and soon you will kill me for your children. O Mother Wolf, do you know how it feels to be killed?"

"No, I don't suppose I do," was the reply. "I've never been killed."

"Then let me tell you it's worse than anything you can dream of," panted Washer.

"How do you know, Little Stranger?" Mother Wolf smiled as she asked this. "You've never been killed."

"No, but can't you imagine how it would feel?"

"Imagine! What is that? I never heard of such a thing."

"Why—imagination is something that helps you to feel just as if the real thing was happening."

Mother Wolf released Washer and let him sit up again. She squatted down before him and looked into his eyes.

"I don't believe wolves have what you call imagination," she replied. "No, I'm sure they don't. Tell me more what it means."

Washer was a very young little Raccoon to be instructing a full-grown wolf, but all of his family had been born with imagination. He could remember how he and his brothers had often listened to the storms raging through the woods and had tried to imagine how it would feel without any home to protect them. They had shuddered at the thought and crept closer together in their nest. But it was very difficult to tell in words just what imagination was.

"Why, there isn't much more to tell," he replied hesitatingly. "It's something you have to feel. Have you ever been hurt, Mother Wolf?"

"Yes, I burnt my front paw once in a fire that campers had left in the woods."

"And it hurt terribly, didn't it?"

Mother Wolf winced and nodded.

"Then," added Washer triumphantly, "if you can feel it now you have imagination. You don't really feel it now, but you imagine how it felt."

"Yes," replied Mother Wolf, "but that's something I did feel once. But I was never killed. So how can I imagine how it would feel to be killed?"

"Just think of your burnt foot, and then think of being burnt all over. You would know then how it would feel to be killed. Oh, it's terrible!"

Mother Wolf was quiet for a long time, and then she looked not unkindly at Washer. "Was that why you were running away?" she asked finally.

"Yes, I didn't want to be killed."

"Then listen, Little Stranger," she said. "You're not going to be killed. I'm going to keep you to play with my little ones, and to teach them things that no wolf can teach them. I will adopt you, and make you one of my own children. No harm will ever come to you. Now come back home with me."

Washer's heart gave a great bound of relief, and he licked the paw near him. He trotted back to the den by the side of Mother Wolf happy and contented; but in the next story you will hear what Sneaky thought of this new arrangement.

STORY FOUR

MOTHER WOLF SAVES WASHER'S LIFE

Sneaky came home early that day, bringing with him a good size fox which he displayed to his young cubs with much satisfaction. Licking his chops and puffing out his cheeks with pride, he said:

"See what a great hunter I am! Nothing escapes me! I risk my life for your sakes, and you must learn to be as good hunters when you grow up."

Mother Wolf smiled a little queerly at the boast of her mate, and when he was through she asked:

"Did you have to risk your life to catch Mr. Fox?"

Sneaky turned and looked a little sheepish, and answered in a voice of wounded pride: "Yes, I nearly slipped off the rock into the water trying to bring him down. It was a great jump I made. It must have been nearly as long as the river is wide."

"I know you're a great jumper," replied Mother Wolf, still smiling. "The greatest jump I ever saw you make was when Loup

the Lynx pursued you in the timber below the falls."

Now reference to this adventure always angered Sneaky, for he had not come out of it with much glory. He had quarreled with Loup over a prize, and in the end they had snarled and snapped at each other like two wild cats. Finally, Loup had lost his temper and sprang at Sneaky's throat, who avoided it by a hair's breadth, and if there hadn't been a wide chasm near the wolf might have lost his life. With a tremendous spring he had cleared the chasm where he could defy the Lynx at a safe distance.

"My dear," Sneaky began, scowling at his mate, "I took that jump just to show Loup what I could do. If he had followed me, I surely would have killed him."

Mother Wolf laughed and cuddled up to one of her little ones. "I know, Sneaky, you're very brave," she said.

That was all, but the way she said it angered Sneaky. It was just as if she had said, "Oh, yes, you're very brave when there's no danger around."

Sneaky switched his tail angrily, and bared his white teeth. Just then he might have done something courageous if there had been a chance, for he was very sore and disturbed that Mother Wolf should speak of his bravery

in such a flippant way before his children.

Suddenly he caught sight of Washer, who had been looking and listening in silence. His eyes gleamed with a yellow light.

"Ah!" he said, stretching out a paw and grasping Washer. "Our Little Stranger is very fat. I think now I'll kill him. Yes, he's very fat," he added, as he felt of Washer's ribs.

Washer was so startled and frightened by this sudden attack that he began squealing and panting for breath. But the louder he cried the more it pleased Sneaky. The heavy paw pressing down upon his back threatened to break his spine.

Mother Wolf suddenly sprang to Washer's rescue. Her own eyes showed baleful yellow, and her teeth, fully as white and long as Sneaky's, were bared to the gums.

"Take your paw off!" she said sharply. "How dare you act like that? If you touch one of my children again you'll go forth to hunt and never return."

"One of your children!" exclaimed Sneaky. "You call this little brat one of your children!"

"Yes, I have adopted him, and I shall raise him to hunt with the pack. You cannot hurt him!"

Sneaky was too surprised at first to speak,

but after a long pause he recovered and laid his head back on his shoulders while a most startling yowl escaped from his throat. It was such a blood-curdling yelp that Washer cringed and cowered in fear. But it was not a battle cry; it was simply Sneaky's way of expressing his merriment. Mother Wolf watched him in silence until he stopped.

"I cannot hurt him!" Sneaky repeated. "My dear, you forget he belongs to me. I caught him, and to me he belongs. Isn't that the law of the pack? Who shall deny me what belongs to me?"

"You forget another law of the pack," snapped Mother Wolf. "Half of the hunt belongs to me and the children. Isn't that the law?"

"Oh, yes, so it is," smiled Sneaky. "Half belongs to my family, and I shall divide with them. Which half do you want, my dear?"

There was a sinister look in the yellow eyes. Mother Wolf read his intentions, and so did Washer. Sneaky intended to divide the Raccoon in two equal halves. How could he do that without killing him?"

Mother Wolf seemed puzzled for an instant, for she could not break the law of the pack, not even to save Washer from death. But an idea came to her finally, and the light of hope returned to her eyes.

"You cannot divide him until I'm ready, Sneaky," she added. "That also is a law of the pack. And I'm not a bit hungry now. I've really eaten more than is good for me. You must save the Little Stranger until I'm ready to eat my half."

Sneaky was greatly chagrined and angered by Mother Wolf's words, for he too had to obey the law of the pack, and he knew that what his mate had said was true. He could not kill Washer without the consent of Mother Wolf, and right down in his heart he knew that she would never give that consent. But if there was a law against killing Washer at once there was none against tormenting him. Sneaky was naturally cruel, and the thought that he could even in this way made his eyes light up suddenly.

"I'll wait, my dear, until you are ready to eat your half," he said in a fawning voice. "The fact is I've eaten rather heartily myself today, too, and we have this fox for our supper. I'll keep the little brat until he's needed. Now go back to your corner!"

With that he gave Washer a cuff with his paw that sent him spinning across the cave.

"Why did you do that?" snarled Mother Wolf, springing before Sneaky.

"I wanted to prepare him for what's com-

ing," drawled Sneaky. "If we harden and toughen him he won't mind so much being eaten."

He grinned at this remark, and made another dive for Washer; but this time the little raccoon escaped and burrowed under the wolf cubs to hide.

"Come out of that!" snapped Sneaky.

He began pawing and scratching to get at Washer when something happened that startled every one in the cave. There was a swift thud and then a snapping of sharp teeth. A howl of pain escaped Sneaky's throat, followed by a whimpering cry of fear.

Mother Wolf had sprang at him and caught him by the scruff of the neck with her powerful jaws, and was shaking him much as a dog would shake a rat. Her teeth were closed so tight that Sneaky couldn't shake them loose. Across the den Mother Wolf jerked him, snapping and snarling and biting until poor Sneaky was terrified. Near the entrance she gave him an extra bite with her sharp teeth, and said:

"Now go out and hunt for the family, and don't come home again until you can behave yourself. I won't have you spoiling the tempers of my children. Away with you!"

And Sneaky cowed and frightened trotted



ACROSS THE DEN MOTHER WOLF JERKED HIM

away, while Mother Wolf returned to the den to calm the fears of her little ones. The next story will tell of how Washer was brought up by the Wolves.

STORY FIVE

SNEAKY VISITS BLACK WOLF

Washer was perfectly safe in the den of wolves after that. Sneaky did not return for a long time, and when he did appear he was so meek and crestfallen that he hardly dared to say a word. Mother Wolf lorded it over him, and made him obey her every wish. She even made him take Washer and the cubs outside to watch them play in front of the cave while she took a rest.

Washer was a little alarmed at first, but Sneaky never so much as raised a paw to hurt him. He was in deadly fear of Mother Wolf.

After a while Washer lost all of his natural fear of being killed, and life became very different to him in the den. It was a pleasant enough home after all, and he was so grateful to Mother Wolf that he couldn't do enough to please her. She smiled at him when he ran to do little errands for her, and patted him on his back. He grew more attentive to her than were her own children.

The cubs were growing rapidly, and Washer soon saw they would be much bigger and stronger than he in time; but they looked up-

on him as one of the family, and always treated him in a friendly way. They began calling him Little Brother, and Mother Wolf in time adopted this name. It was much better than Little Stranger, for Washer was no longer a stranger, and it seemed absurd to call him that.

Sneaky at first refused to use that name, and when alone with the raccoon he would often call him "Brat" or "Scamp." Washer didn't mind this, for he knew Sneaky didn't dare abuse him.

In time the cubs grew so strong and active that they had to spend most of their time out of doors. They trotted around in the bushes, exploring the woods further and further away from home. Sneaky and Mother Wolf watched them with admiring eyes, and encouraged them in this.

"They will have to learn to hunt for themselves some day," Mother Wolf said, "and I hope they'll be good hunters."

"If they take after their father they certainly will be," replied Sneaky, licking his chops with satisfaction.

Mother Wolf did not notice this remark, for she was looking at Washer. "I wonder what kind of a hunter Little Brother will be,"

she added. "Will he hunt like a Wolf or—or like a Raccoon?"

"Like a Raccoon," replied Sneaky. "Can a Wolf change his nature, or a Raccoon be other than a Raccoon?"

Mother Wolf could not deny the truth of Sneaky's remarks, and she sighed. Somehow she had grown greatly attached to Little Brother, and she wanted him to grow up and be like her own children.

"He must be taught to hunt with the pack," she said suddenly. "He will learn their ways, and do as they do. Yes, we must take him to the pack and introduce him."

Now this seemed to be a good time for Sneaky to get even with Mother Wolf for thwarting him in bringing up Washer. What would the others of the pack say when she brought a Raccoon in place of a Wolf to be entered as a member? He smiled in his superior sort of way, and nodded his head.

"I think, my dear," he said, grinning, "you'd better leave Little Brother home when we take our children to the pack. They'd laugh at you, and maybe kill Little Brother."

Mother Wolf's eyes looked a little troubled. She hadn't foreseen this difficulty, and it might be true that the other wolves would refuse to receive Little Brother as a member.

But she had grown so fond of Washer that she was ready to stand up for him to the end.

"If they won't receive him," she replied, "they'll never get my children. I'll not let them join the pack."

Sneaky was immediately angered by this threat, and in spite of his fear of Mother Wolf he jumped to his feet and let out a growl. "You don't dare do that!" he cried. "Our children must join the pack, and you can't deny them. I'll see that they join. I'll take them myself."

"Don't get excited, Sneaky," interrupted his mate. "You can't take them unless I consent."

This also was a law of the pack, and Sneaky was angrier than ever. "Why do you always want to oppose me?" he cried. "The children are as dear to me as they are to you, and I must have something to say about their bringing up. They cannot hunt alone in the woods. If you don't let them join I'll see Black Wolf, our leader. Yes, I'll see him at once, and lay the whole matter before him."

Mother Wolf was a little troubled at this, and she tried to dissuade him. "Wait until it's time to take them to the pack, Sneaky," she said in a friendly way. "I wouldn't trouble

Black Wolf now. He's very busy, you know."

"No," growled Sneaky stubbornly, "I'll see him at once. I've given in to you in everything, but now it's my turn to rule. I'll go to Black Wolf tonight."

Sneaky could be very stubborn if he made up his mind, and Mother Wolf saw that he was determined now to appeal to the leader of the pack over her head. She sighed, but pretended not to care.

"All right, Sneaky," she replied meekly, "but see that you tell the truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Trust me for that," was the grinning reply.

And that very night Sneaky trotted away through the dark woods to where Black Wolf lived in a den by himself. Black Wolf was not only the leader of the pack, but a big powerful creature with hair so long and shaggy that no animal who tried to kill him could bite through it to reach his flesh. He had eyes that could see through the blackest night, and muscles that were like steel.

He received Sneaky with a growl of discontent, for he had traveled far that day to settle another family dispute among his people, and he was very tired and drowsy.

"What do you want, Sneaky?" he demand-

ed fiercely. "Can't you see I'm tired and sleepy?"

"Yes, Black Wolf, I know you've earned a good night's rest, but I bring a gift to you," replied Sneaky, laying before the leader the leg of a lamb he had stolen from a farm-house on his way.

"Thanks," replied Black Wolf, sniffing to see if it was fresh meat. "I'll eat it in the morning."

He closed his eyes, and soon would have been snoring if Sneaky hadn't continued. "I came to see you for another reason," he added. "I want to lay a question before you. Is it against the law of the pack to admit a Raccoon as a member?"

Black Wolf opened one eye, and said crossly: "Why do you want to bother me with such a foolish question, Sneaky! I'm in no mood for joking."

"This is no joke, Black Wolf. It's very serious. My mate has brought up a Raccoon as one of her children, and now she intends to bring him to the pack for admission. What message shall I carry back to her?"

Black Wolf snorted, and raised his head long enough to think. Then, in a loud voice he added: "Go back and tell her that if she brings a Raccoon to the pack we'll pounce

upon him and eat him alive. Go and tell her that I, Black Wolf, leader of the pack, has given his word."

"Thank you," replied Sneaky, bowing low, and crawling out of the den. He had obtained just the message he wanted, and he couldn't hurry fast enough to deliver it to Mother Wolf. In the next story we will see what Mother Wolf thought of it.

STORY SIX

MOTHER WOLF DECIDES TO ADOPT WASHER

Sneaky returned home and entered the den with every appearance of being greatly pleased with himself. He licked his chops, smiled at the cubs, and said a pleasant word of greeting to Mother Wolf. Indeed, he was so polite and agreeable that Washer wondered if something had happened to change his disposition for good; but Mother Wolf was not at all deceived. She understood that Sneaky had some important news on his mind that he was anxious to get off.

After a while, when the little ones were outside of the den playing, she humored him with a smile, and said: "Why don't you tell me now, Sneaky? You've been dying to get it off your mind. Now's a good time."

"What do you mean my dear?" he asked, opening one eye, and looking as surprised and innocent as a baby.

"Don't put on that innocent air," protested his mate impatiently. "I've lived long enough with you to know when important news is bothering you. Now out with it!"

Sneaky yawned dreadfully long, and

stretched his limbs in the most deliberate manner. He knew that Mother Wolf was as impatient to hear the news as he was to tell it. So he did not propose to humor her right away.

"You surprise me, my dear," he said finally. "What news do you speak of? I'm not a carrier of tales like Grayback the Weasel or Mr. Fox. I wouldn't stoop to such things."

Mother Wolf laughed so hard that she had to hold her sides with both front paws. There was no way to tease Sneaky equal to that of laughing at his serious remarks. In a few minutes his face grew red and his ears lay back, and all the innocent expression vanished from his eyes.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," he growled. "Why don't you tell me what it is, and I'll join you if it's worth a laugh. It's very ill-mannered of any one to laugh alone in company!"

"Yes, I suppose it is," replied Mother-Wolf, wiping her eyes. "But"—regarding him slyly out of the corner of her eyes—"I didn't know you were company, Sneaky. Are you?"

"Never mind such foolish questions!" was the quick retort. "What were you laughing at—*me?*"

"Why, no, Sneaky, not at you. I wouldn't do such a thing. But I was laughing at what you had on your mind."

"What had I on my mind?"

"The news that Black Wolf sent to me."

Sneaky was a little taken back by this remark, for he hadn't mentioned any message from Black Wolf.

"How do you know I've been to see Black Wolf?" he asked after a pause.

"You said you we're going. Didn't you expect me to believe you? Surely you haven't begun fibbing to me at your time of life, have you, Sneaky?"

"No, of course not," he stammered. "I didn't mean that. Yes, I've been to see Black Wolf."

"And he sent a message with you for me?"

"Well, now that you speak of it I remember he did," replied Sneaky, squatting down on his haunches.

"Then why didn't you say so at first?" snapped Mother Wolf. "Why did you pretend surprise, and try to look so innocent? I knew all the time you had a message for me, and it was because you were trying so hard to look innocent that made me laugh. Sneaky, you're not a good actor. I wouldn't try it again if I were you."

His pride was wounded at this denial of all talent for acting, and Sneaky dropped his nose down between his paws and looked very crestfallen. "I suppose," he grumbled, "you think you know so much you could tell me what Black Wolf's message is."

Mother Wolf paused before him and looked silently into his eyes before she spoke again. Then she nodded her head. "I think I could almost guess it."

"Then it isn't necessary for me to tell you," replied Sneaky, thinking he had cornered her this time.

"Black Wolf was very much surprised and disgusted when you told him I was to bring Little Brother into the pack," she went on, ignoring his remark, "and of course you didn't help matters any by telling my side of the story. You didn't tell Black Wolf how I had brought Little Brother up as my own child until I loved him as much as any of the cubs. You didn't tell him that from the first you wanted to kill him, and that you were anxious to get rid of him, and turn him loose in the woods so the whole pack could hunt him. You didn't tell him that he had been with us for so long that he was more Wolf than Raccoon, and that his own people would not accept him, and if we abandoned him he

would be without any family or friends. Oh, no you didn't explain any of these things to Black Wolf!"

"But, my dear, how could you expect me in a few minutes to tell all that?" protested Sneaky. "Black Wolf was very tired and surly, and he didn't want to talk to me at all. If I hadn't taken a present to him he would have turned me out without listening."

Mother Wolf nodded. "I can quite understand that, Sneaky. He's bothered to death by settling the quarrels of the pack. It's not all pleasure in being a leader."

"I should think not. It's a terribly responsible position, and I know if I were leader I'd have my time well occupied."

"Yes, I think you would. You wouldn't have time to be interfering with home matters so much. It must be great to be the mate of the leader of the pack."

Sneaky raised his head and flashed an angry glance at Mother Wolf, for her words recalled something unpleasant to the memory. When a young Wolf, with eyes always smiling and laughing, and hair long and curly as the silk of the corn tassel, Mother Wolf was the envy of every hunter of the pack, and Black Wolf had cast envious eyes upon her before he had been chosen leader. Sneaky recalled also that

he had deceived Black Wolf by telling him one day that Mother Wolf had promised to be his mate, although no such promise had then been made. He wondered if Mother Wolf had ever found out his little deception, and if Black Wolf suspected anything. This doubt had given him many unpleasant moments.

His wandering thoughts were suddenly recalled to the present by Mother Wolf. "Black Wolf told you," she said quietly, "that if I brought Little Brother to the pack council he'd refuse to receive him as a member. Isn't that what he said?"

"Yes," admitted Sneaky, "and he said something more. If you bring Little Brother before him, he'll order the whole pack to pounce on him and kill him."

"He said that!" exclaimed Mother Wolf in alarm. "Black Wolf sent that message to me."

"Yes," replied Sneaky, smiling. "Now if you love Little Brother you will keep him away from the pack council. You'd better turn him loose and let him return to his own people."

Mother Wolf was silent a moment. Then she raised her head, and said defiantly: "No, I'll never do that. His own people would reject him. I've brought him up, and I'll al-

ways be a mother to him unless he turns against me, and even then I shall continue to love him."

She stopped before adding her final challenge. "And, listen, Sneaky, I shall take him before the pack council, and if Black Wolf orders the pack to pounce on him they'll have to fight me first."

Sneaky was so troubled by this that he had nothing to say. In the next story Washer shows the cubs a trick.

STORY SEVEN

WASHER LEARNS HE IS NOT A WOLF

Washer the Raccoon had been hunting with his Wolf brothers in the woods around their cave den. This was a part of their education. Mother Wolf would take them for a walk some distance from the cave, and teach them to pick up the scent of other animals on the wind. Sometimes it would be Brownny the Muskrat or Sleepy the Opossum and again that of White Tail the Deer or Puma the Mountain Lion who had wandered away from their natural haunts.

Whatever animal it was they scented, Mother Wolf would caution them to follow it carefully, sneaking through the bushes with padded feet so as not to break a twig. She herself would remain behind so that all the responsibility of the hunt would be on her children.

In the early days of these lessons, Washer was the quickest to learn, and the quickest to follow the scent. He was older than his Wolf Brothers, and this accounted for his quickness. He could run faster than any of them, although his legs were shorter, and could climb

up embankments and rocks without losing his foothold.

"Well done, Little Brother," Mother Wolf would say proudly when he had out-distanced all his brothers. "Some day you will be a mighty hunter. Who knows but you may be leader of the pack yet."

Now Mother Wolf loved the stray little orphan so much that she was blind to many things that she should have thought of. For one thing no raccoon was ever as large as a wolf, as strong, nor as fleet of foot. It was because Washer had the start in life that he seemed bigger and quicker of mind than her own children.

As the days and weeks passed, the Wolf cubs grew amazingly. They caught up to Washer, and then surpassed him in size. Their legs grew long and slender, and one day in a race Washer was left behind in spite of all that he could do. It was the first race with the cubs he had ever lost.

"Hi! What's the matter, Little Brother?" the cubs called to him. "You're lazy today!"

"Yes, maybe I am," replied Washer, but he had an uneasy feeling that it was something more than laziness. His shorter legs could go as fast as his brother's, but they could not cover so much ground.

The next day it was the same. They had all started on a scamper for the brook, with Washer in the lead at the beginning, but long before they reached the water the raccoon was behind.

"Lazy again, Little Brother!" they laughed when he came up to them.

"No, I couldn't run any faster," Washer replied truthfully. "You've got longer legs than mine, and I can't keep up with you."

"So they are longer," replied the cubs, looking at their own long legs.

"And you have stronger teeth and jaws than I have," continued Washer. "You grow much faster. I don't seem to grow at all any more."

"Oh, your time will come," they answered, not wishing to offend him.

They continued to play together as formerly, but Washer always had to be given a head start in a race. Then one day another thing surprised them. They were tearing at their food when Washer found that he could no longer hold his own in this battle. The cubs had more powerful jaws than he, and they jerked the food away from him and gobbled it up.

"I didn't get half my share," Washer grumbled.

"Why not? Can't you help yourself?"

Washer was silent. The truth was beginning to dawn upon him that he was different from his brothers. They were fleet of foot and stronger of jaws. They could also jump longer distances, taking gullies and ravines in leaps that carried them clear across. Washer had to run around or climb down and then up the ravines.

"Little Brother, you can't keep up with us any more," the cubs said one day more in sadness than in boastfulness. "How'll you join the hunt with us when we become members of the pack?"

"Listen, brothers," Washer said, "I cannot run as fast as you, nor fight as fiercely for my food, but there is one thing I can do that will surprise you. I can go where none of you can follow."

They laughed at this challenge, and told him to show them the trick. "We'll follow you," they said. "You can't lose us."

"All right! Follow me!"

Washer had found out that his sharp little claws were perfectly adapted to tree climbing, and that his Wolf brothers could not get up a tree higher than the lowest branches which they might reach by jumping. He had

tried climbing trees and found that it came as easy to him as running.

There was a big cedar tree near the brook, and after looking up it he started to climb the trunk. It was so easy for him that he went up it almost as quickly as Bobby Gray Squirrel could. His Wolf brothers sat down on their haunches in a circle around the tree and watched him in amazement.

Washer reached the first branches, and ran out on one big one. "Look out, Little Brother, or you'll fall! they shouted. "Be careful!"

Washer smiled and showed his teeth. "Oh, this is nothing! I'll climb to the top!"

He ran back to the trunk, and began climbing higher. Up and up he went until his little body was lost among the foliage.

"He's lost!" exclaimed the Wolf cubs below. "Something's happened to him! I can't see him!"

But Washer, having reached the top-most branch of the tree, bit off a twig and threw it down at them. "Here I am!" he cried. "Now follow me up here!"

The Wolf cubs immediately accepted the challenge. They started for the tree and began pawing at it. They jumped and leaped up the trunk, and tried in every way to climb it. Their failure was so ludicrous that

Washer laughed heartily, encouraging them with loud words.

But no wolf can climb a tree, and the cubs soon stopped their efforts. Once more they squatted around in a circle and looked up at Washer.

"Will you teach me to climb?" asked one after another.

Washer considered a moment, and then said: "It's something that can't be taught brothers. If I could I would, but no wolf can ever climb a tree."

They were so surprised and amazed at the exploit of their Little Brother in climbing a tree that they surrounded him all the way home and pestered him with all sorts of questions. When they reached the den they demanded of Mother Wolf the reason why they could not climb a tree like Little Brother. Mother Wolf was both sad and pleased.

"I can't tell you," she replied, "why a wolf cannot climb a tree. But he simply can't any more than he can fly like a bird. Little Brother is a Raccoon, you know, and—"

"What's a Raccoon? Isn't he a wolf?"

"No, dears, Little Brother isn't a wolf."

All the cubs looked in surprise at Washer. He was not like them. He wasn't a Wolf. In

the next story Washer finds one of his people treed by the cubs.

STORY EIGHT

THE CUBS TREE A STRANGER

Thereafter there was a different feeling between the Wolf cubs and Washer the Raccoon. The former could not help feeling that Washer was an outsider, and while they tried to conceal their feelings they were not entirely successful. He was not only not their real brother, but he was a different kind of an animal—not a wolf at all.

One day when they were down by the brook, Washer plucked a rich, juicy root to eat, for there had not been enough meat to go around that day, and Washer was hungry.

“What are you going to do with that, Little Brother?” one of the cubs asked, watching him carry the root away in his mouth.

“Why, eat it, of course,” was the reply.

“What a funny thing to eat! I never ate a root before.”

It was a fact that wolves never liked roots or leaves, while raccoons frequently eat both. Washer felt a little embarrassed, but he carried the root to the brook and dipped it in. The Wolf cubs followed him.

“What are you doing that for?” added an-

other, as the raccoon continued to dip the root in the water.

"Washing it, of course, before eating it," was the reply.

Once more there was surprise and curiosity on the faces of the cubs. Washer had unintentionally betrayed a trick of all his ancestors. The raccoons nearly always dipped and washed their food in water before eating it. It was the most natural thing in the world for him to do it, but it was not until he saw the look of wonder in the eyes of his playmates that he realized this little act indicated once more what a wide difference there was between them.

"Do all raccoons wash their food before eating it," continued one of the cubs.

Washer nodded his head and began daintily chewing the soft root. The cubs bit at the other end of it, but they saw nothing in it to appeal to their taste.

"What funny creatures raccoons must be, Little Brother!"

Washer was a little annoyed and angered by this remark, for he was a raccoon, and he wasn't going to have his people ridiculed.

"They climb trees," continued the speaker, "and wash their food before eating it. Isn't it funny, brothers!"

They all set up a laugh, which increased Washer's anger. "They're no funnier than Wolves," he blurted out suddenly. "You hunt in packs as if afraid, and sneak upon your victims instead of fighting them face to face. I think that cowardly. Now raccoons don't do that."

"We didn't mean to offend you, Little Brother," replied the first cub, seeing Washer's anger. "Next to being a wolf we'd rather be raccoons. Yes, indeed!"

The others repeated this until Washer felt sorry for his show of anger. Still he was quite sad, for he began to realize that he could not always be with his little brothers. The day would come when he would have to leave them. They were growing so big and so rough in their play that many times he had to retire and look on. Then, too, they were beginning to take long hunting trips through the woods, and he could not keep up with them. Sneaky in particular took delight in running him out of breath, and then laughing at him.

"Listen, Brothers," he said, turning sorrowfully upon them, "I am a raccoon and you are wolves. Some day you will have to hunt without me. Then I shall return to my own people, for it isn't right that a raccoon should

live with wolves. But I shall always have a tender feeling for you in my heart, and shall always remember you."

"No we won't hunt without you," interrupted one of the cubs. "You can't leave us. You're our Little Brother, and you'll always be that!"

Washer was greatly pleased by this show of affection for it made him very sad to think of leaving the only home he had lived in since a small baby; but right down in his heart he knew that he would some day leave them and go back to his own people.

Washer had only a dim remembrance of his own real brothers. The accident on the river when he was carried over the falls seemed so long ago that it was more like a dream now than anything else. He couldn't even remember what his mother looked like, and as for his brothers they were only tiny baby raccoons then and now they had grown up he would not recognize them.

A few days after this conversation, the Wolf cubs were playing near the brook when one of them suddenly raised his nose in the air and began sniffing. The others immediately stopped their play and sniffed the air also.

"What is it?" asked Washer.

"I smell something good," replied the first wolf. "It's over this way.

"Then we'll go around the other way and head him off," said another cub.

Washer knew their method of hunting an animal they had once winded. They would spread out in a wide circle, and creep upon him from all directions. Sneaky had taught them this trick, and when they hunted together in this way it was hard for anything to escape them. No matter which way the hunted animal went he was pretty sure to run into one of the pack.

Washer had caught the odor on the wind, but he was not sure just what kind of an animal it came from. The smell seemed familiar, and yet he could not place it. It annoyed and puzzled him. Was his memory growing short?

He decided to follow the cubs in the chase and for a time he managed to keep up with them; but when they finally caught sight of their prey they broke from the cover of the bushes and ran in full tilt after him. Washer was quickly left behind.

In a short time he could tell by their howls that they had run their victim to earth. They were yelping and howling, but not entirely with pleasure.

"What's the matter?" Washer asked himself. "Have they stalked Buster the Bear or Loup the Lynx? I must hurry and see."

He ran as fast as his short legs would permit, and in a few minutes he came out into an opening in the woods. In the center of this was a small tree, around which the Wolf cubs were circling wildly, leaping up as high as they could every now and then, but always falling short of their mark.

Washer came up, panting and gasping; "What is it, Brothers?" he called. "Where is it?"

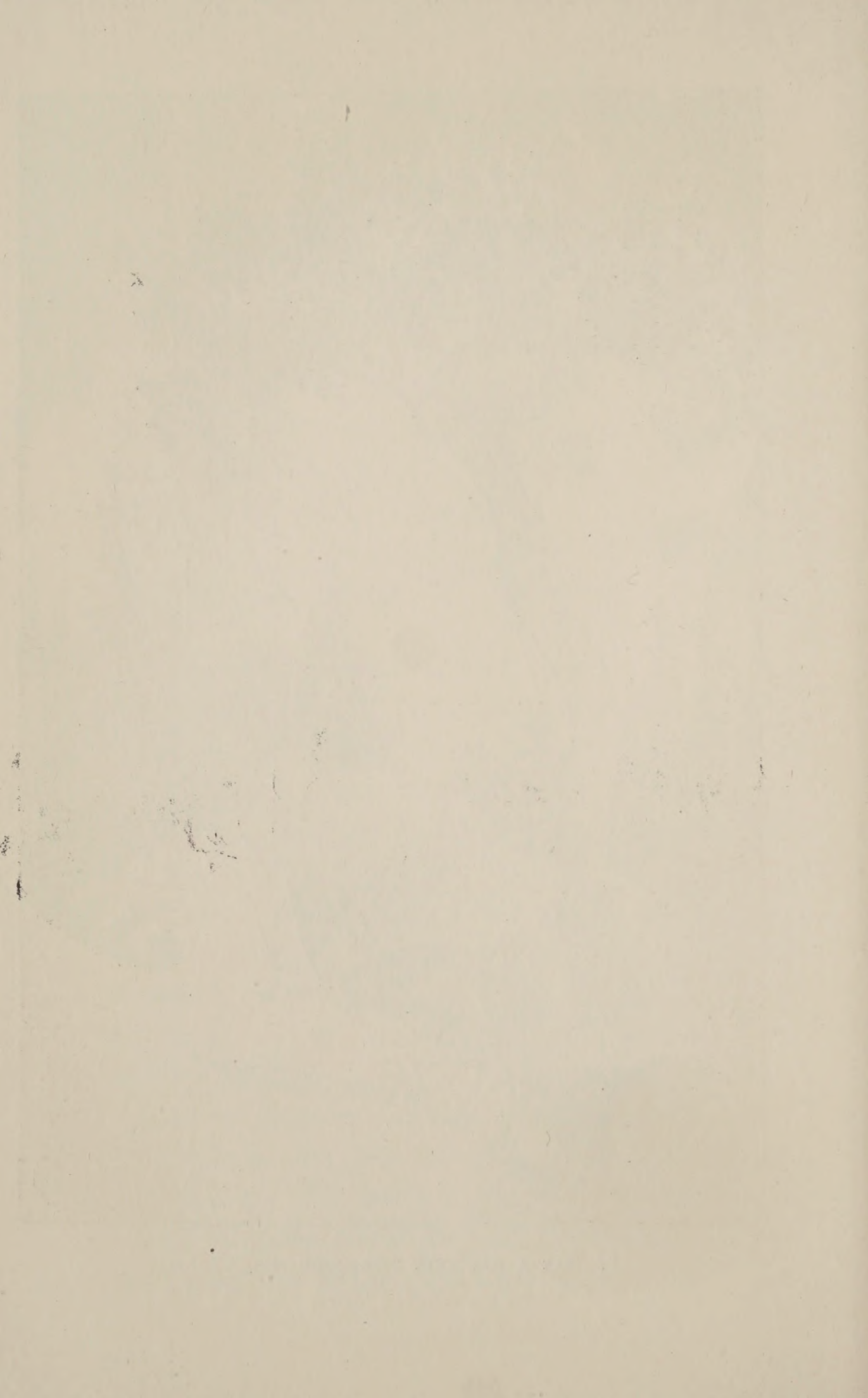
"Up the tree!" shouted one of the cubs. "We can't reach him, but you can Little Brother. You can climb the tree and drive him down. Now I know we'll always need you when we go hunting. Hurry up and drive him out of the tree!"

Washer saw a dark, fuzzy ball high among the branches of the small tree. He could not make it out at first, but there was something familiar about it, and the odor!—why, he knew that odor! He had always known it!

But he stopped suddenly and glanced up at the pair of frightened eyes looking down at the wolves. He gave a gasp and shudder. It was a raccoon the cubs had treed—one of his own people. How could he betray him to the



IT WAS A RACCOON THE CUBS HAD TREED



greedy cubs, and if he didn't what would his wolf brothers think of him? In the next story you will read about what Washer did for the raccoon.

STORY NINE

WASHER SAVES ONE OF HIS OWN PEOPLE

When Washer discovered that it was one of his own people driven up the tree by the wolves, he felt a queer sensation stealing over him. For the first time he seemed to realize how cruel the Wolf cubs were in their hunting, and how terrible the hunted must feel. It was almost as if he was up that tree with a lot of wolves below howling for his blood.

Something like anger and disgust for the cubs sprang up in his heart. What right had they to chase every weaker animal in the woods and kill him! Why couldn't they let other animals live in peace in the woods!

While he sat there thinking of these things, the young wolves were leaping up at the treed raccoon and howling dismally every time they fell short of reaching him. Finally one of the cubs turned to Washer.

"Why don't you go up the tree and drive him down?" he asked. "Hurry up, Little Brother, for we're hungry. Go up and shake the branch, and we'll catch him as he falls."

Washer began to tremble, not with fear, but because he knew he had to save the raccoon

in some way, and he couldn't think of any trick that would do it. The cubs mistook his trembling for fear, and one of them exclaimed:

"Little Brother's afraid to go up the tree! See, he's trembling all over!"

"When was Little Brother afraid before?" asked another. "Surely he's not afraid of that animal."

Washer saw that they had not recognized the animal up the tree as one of his own people. They hardly knew a raccoon from any other animal. This fact gave Washer new hope. He didn't want to betray to them his feelings.

"Are you afraid, Little Brother?" added another, standing before him. "I don't believe it."

"No, I'm not afraid," replied Washer finally, recovering from his embarrassment. "When was I afraid of anything! Have I not played and fought with you all, and did you ever know me to beg for mercy? Then why should I be afraid of that small animal?"

"I knew it, Little Brother," replied the last cub. "Now you'll go up the tree and shake him down to us."

Washer rose to his feet and trotted away from the tree. "Come here, Brothers," he

called, "I want to talk to you, and we must not be overheard. Now listen," he added, "when they were at a safe distance from the tree, 'you've heard of Billy Porcupine, haven't you?'"

"Billy Porcupine! Oh, you mean the animal with the prickly thorns! Yes, we've heard of him."

Washer nodded his head. "Then you remember that Mother Wolf and Sneaky always told you to beware of Billy Porcupine. If you didn't he'd run his thorns in your nose, and it would take days and days for the wounds to heal up."

"Yes, they told us that!" they exclaimed in unison. Then in little frightened voices they added; "Is that Billy Porcupine up the tree?"

Washer did not answer directly, but he looked very wise. "Now, listen again," he added, "there's only one thing to do. You must run back to the den and tell Mother Wolf or Sneaky. They will know what to do. I'll stay here and watch, and if Mother Wolf tells me to go up the tree I'll go even if I get stuck full of quills."

The cubs were greatly impressed by these words, for they had heard many tales of the wounds inflicted by Billy Porcupine's quills,

and they shuddered at the thought of getting them in their mouth and nose.

"I'll stay here with you, Little Brother," the oldest of the cubs said. "If he comes down we'll corner him and hold him until Mother Wolf comes."

"No you must go with your brothers," replied Washer. "I can watch him alone. I'm not afraid of him."

"You're a brave Little Brother!" they exclaimed in a breath.

Washer urged them to hurry, and after a while they decided to race back to the den and summon their parents. Washer promised to stand guard under the tree until they returned.

Their great discovery excited the cubs, and they were anxious to see how Mother Wolf or Sneaky would handle this strange animal that went around in the woods armed with sharp quills. They disappeared in the bushes, each anxious to beat all the others to the cave.

The moment they had gone, Washer ran back to the tree and looked up it. The raccoon was still crouching there in a high branch. Washer looked curiously at him, and then called:

"Raccoon! Little Raccoon, come down now, and run away. My wolf brothers have

gone, but they'll soon return. Run and hide in your hole or find a bigger tree."

There was a noise in the branches overhead, and the raccoon crawled down a few feet. Washer looked at him, and then retreated a step or two. It was not a little raccoon, but a big one, with sharp claws and fine, white teeth. He was so much bigger than Washer that he felt a little awe of him.

"Why do you call the wolves your brothers?" the raccoon asked. "You're a raccoon, aren't you? Then the wolves can't be your brothers. They're the enemies of my people."

Washer looked a little embarrassed. "Yes, I'm a raccoon," he replied, "but the wolves saved me, and Mother Wolf brought me up as one of her own. I've always lived with her in her den. She's been kind to me, and I love her."

The big raccoon showed his teeth and crawled down another branch. "You love a wolf!" he said angrily. "Then you're a traitor to your own people!"

Washer was greatly surprised and distressed by this remark. "No, I'm not a traitor. Because I love Mother Wolf for what she's done for me isn't any reason why I shouldn't love my own people."

"I hear them coming back!" snapped the

raccoon in the tree. "I must be off or they'll catch me. This tree is too small. I'll find a bigger one."

"Yes, do hurry! I hear them howling now. They'll be here soon."

The big raccoon dropped to the ground and stood by the side of Washer. He was so much bigger that Washer felt like a baby alongside of him. He was a fierce old creature, too, for he kept gnashing his teeth and switching his tail.

"Well, aren't you coming with me?" he asked. "If you know the woods you might lead me to a good hiding place."

"No, I can't go with you," replied Washer a little sadly. "I must wait for my brothers and Mother Wolf. They're all the friends I have."

"The wolves are your friends?" snapped the big raccoon. "Then you're a traitor to your people! I believe this is only a trick to deceive me. I'll teach you to betray us!"

Before Washer realized what he meant, the big fellow leaped toward him and bit him two or three times on the body and front paws. Then with a grunt of delight, he ran away and disappeared in the woods. Frightened by this sudden attack by one of his own people, Washer gave a squeal of pain and dropped

down on the ground bleeding. Just then the wolves broke through the bushes and came racing toward the tree, with Sneaky in the lead.

In the next story Washer confesses to Mother Wolf, and she decides to take him to the council rock to meet Black Wolf.

STORY TEN

MOTHER WOLF LISTENS TO WASHER'S STORY

Mother Wolf was close behind, but Sneaky reached Washer's side first. There was a suspicious leer on his face, but the sight of the blood on the raccoon's body seemed to puzzle him. He stopped and glanced up at the tree.

"Where's Billy Porcupine?" he asked. "I don't see him in the tree."

"He ran down and escaped," replied Washer. "I couldn't stop him."

Sneaky licked his chops, and added: "Quite likely!" He sniffed among the lower branches of the tree. "If my nose doesn't deceive me there's been no porcupine around here. No, sir; nothing but raccoons."

He turned and smiled at Mother Wolf and the youngsters. He felt quite proud of his spying quality. "I smell nothing but raccoon up that tree," he added. "Therefore, it was a raccoon, and not a porcupine, that you treed."

"But little brother said it was Billy the Porcupine," interrupted one of the cubs.

"How'd Little Brother know it was a porc-

upine?" asked Sneaky. "When did you ever see one?"

Now Washer was feeling very miserable, first, because his wounds hurt him, and second because one of his own people had turned on him and attacked him after he had saved his life. So he spoke without thinking. "I don't know," he stammered. "Maybe I never saw one."

"Ah! ha!" scoffed Sneaky. "I thought so. It was only a trick to deceive us. I see now what it means."

He turned to the tree again, and looked up it, and began sniffing at the trunk and limbs. "Nothing but raccoon odor," he added. "No porcupine has been here."

"For goodness sake," interrupted Mother Wolf, wiping the blood from Washer's face, "what are you wasting your time about? Why don't you help Little Brother? He's all bloody, and we must help him home."

"Ah, bloody! So he is! Then if it was Billy the Porcupine we should find quills sticking in him."

He examined Washer's wounds a little roughly, smiling all the time. Of course, there were no porcupine quills, and this seemed to please Sneaky immensely.

"Just as I thought," he said finally. "There

are no quills. Therefore, there was no porcupine here. Then why did Little Brother deceive you?"

He turned to the cubs, who were watching him curiously.

"I'll tell you, my children," he continued. "It was a raccoon you had treed—one of Little Brother's own people. He knew it all the time, and he didn't want you to have him for your dinner. So he told you this little story about a porcupine, and sent you home to call us while his friend could escape in the woods. See, he's gone. There's nothing up the tree."

They followed the direction of his pointing nose. The tree was empty. Then they turned their eyes toward Washer.

"Can you deny that, Little Brother?" Sneaky added in a beguiling voice. "Of course you can't."

"But how'd he get hurt?" asked one of the cubs. "See, he's bleeding all over."

Mother Wolf interfered at this moment. "Sneaky, you run down to the brook and get some water," she commanded. "If Little Brother didn't meet a porcupine, he ran into something just as bad. We won't stop to discuss that now. Hurry up with that water!"

Sneaky dropped his tail between his legs and started for the brook, but half way there

he stopped and said: "It wasn't a porcupine, I know that. Therefore, it was a raccoon. Little Brother deceived my children to save his life. No wolf will stand for that. He's not a friend of my people. I'll tell Black Wolf that."

Mother Wolf, who had been busy cleaning the blood from Washer's fur, looked a little disturbed. Sneaky had another argument against admitting Washer to the wolf pack.

"Little Brother," she whispered, "it is true what Sneaky says? Was Billy Porcupine up that tree?"

Washer could not deceive Mother Wolf. She had been too kind to him. "No," he answered, "it was a raccoon, and I couldn't bear to see him killed. He belonged to my own people."

Mother Wolf nodded her head, showing that she understood his feelings. "But these wounds," she added, a little puzzled. "How did you get them?"

Washer was greatly distressed at this question. If he told the truth, he would have to condemn one of his own people of ingratitude, but even that was better than deceiving Mother Wolf.

"It was the raccoon," he answered after a pause. "When he came down the tree he bit

me. He thought I belonged to the wolf pack, and he called me a traitor. I don't suppose he understood."

"He didn't deserve the kindness you showed him," was the quick retort. "If he was near here I'd send the children and Sneaky after him. He deserves punishment. Do you know where he's hiding?"

"No! He ran away in the woods and that was the last I saw of him."

Mother Wolf had such confidence in Washer that she did not doubt his word. She knew that Little Brother would not deceive her to protect one of his own people.

"Well, I'm glad he isn't here," she added, sighing. "Sneaky would hunt him down, and I don't suppose you'd like to see him killed, even if he did bite you."

"No, I don't wish him harm."

Washer's voice was a little trembly, and a tear stood in one of his eyes. "What is it," asked Mother Wolf sympathetically, "that makes you so sad, Little Brother? Do your wounds hurt you so much?"

"No, I was thinking of my people," replied Washer. "They won't have me. They'll turn against me because I was brought up in a wolf's den, and your people won't have me. I'm an outcast—without a home or people."

"Don't say that," whispered Mother Wolf. "You're my adopted child, and I shall always look after you. My people will have to take you. If they don't—"

Her eyes flashed, and Washer knew that she was prepared to fight for him. But he had no desire to bring trouble to her, and he said: "No, no, don't do that. Let me go away in the woods. I'm old enough now to make a living. You must not introduce me to the pack. I shall always remember you and my Wolf Brothers, but no good can come of trying to make me a wolf. I'm only a raccoon."

"Little Brother, don't talk like that. I'm going to take you tomorrow to the council, and Black Wolf shall listen to me. My people must protect you. If Black Wolf says so none of them will dare harm you. Come now, and don't feel sad any more."

Washer tried to dry his eyes and look cheerful, but it was not very easy to do this. His own people had denied him, and he dreaded appearing before the wolf pack. He knew that Sneaky would condemn him, and try to drive him away, and the very thought of Black Wolf made him shudder. What kind of a leader was he, and would he listen to Mother Wolf's pleadings? In the next story you will read of how Mother Wolf took him

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to the council and pleaded with and defied the leader of the wolf pack.

STORY ELEVEN

WASHER IS INTRODUCED TO THE WOLF PACK

Washer was taken with the cubs the following night to the wolf council where they were to be introduced to the pack and formally admitted as members. All young wolves when they reach the hunting age had to be introduced by their parents, and the leader of the pack then announced their acceptance and gave to each a name. Until that time they were simply cubs, unfit to hunt with the older wolves.

The council was held in the deepest, thickest part of the woods where no wild animal or hunter would be likely to disturb them. Once a month in the full of the moon the pack assembled around a big flat rock overlooking a pool of water. Here they waited until Black Wolf, their leader, came and called the council to order.

Mother Wolf was anxious to get to the council early, and she started her family off long before moon was up above the tops of the trees. Sneaky led the way, with the cubs filing behind him, and Mother Wolf bringing up the rear.

They were so early that they met none of the other wolves on the way, and Mother Wolf gave a sigh of relief when she found no one ahead of her. She drew up her little circle of young ones in the shadow of a clump of birches on the right of the council rock, and then dropped down to rest.

All was quiet in the woods. Not even Hoot the Owl or Whip-Poor-Will was abroad to disturb the silence of the great woods. Occasionally a shadow drifted across the flat rock, and a wolf would take his place in front or on one side of it. The moon rose slowly until it cast a flood of white light upon the top of the rock. Almost at the same moment there was a howl nearby, and out of the thickets sprang Black Wolf, the leader. He stood a moment looking at the crouching pack, and then he leaped to the top of the council rock. The whole pack rose as one and gave vent to their hunting cry.

This was their way of recognizing their leader. Black Wolf stood a moment, a tall, gaunt, powerful creature, in the white moonlight, as if challenging any opposition, and then he dropped down with his front paws curled under him.

"The council is open," he announced.

"Has any one a message for the pack? We're all here."

Sneaky rose from his position near Mother Wolf, and trotted in front of the rock. "O Black Wolf, noble leader of the pack," he began, "I bring my cubs for your inspection. May they please you, and prove worthy of their sire."

"Bring them forth!" replied Black Wolf. "They should be good cubs if they take after you, Sneaky."

The different members of the pack craned their heads forward to see Sneaky's cubs, which, at the bidding of their parent, filed out in a row and stood before the council rock. Black Wolf surveyed them in silence, inspecting them with his fierce dark eyes.

"You have done well by the pack, Sneaky," he announced finally. "I name the first one Curly because his beautiful fur curls backward at the tips. The second one shall be known as Spotted Wolf, for I see gray spots under his neck. And the last one shall be known as Tiger Wolf because of the fierceness of his eyes. I have named them, and so shall they be known to the pack."

He stopped and looked hard at Sneaky, as if expecting him to say more; but Sneaky was

pleased with his presentation, and backed slowly away.

"Is there any more, Sneaky?" the leader asked.

Before Sneaky could reply, a tall, gaunt figure of a wolf rose from the shadows of the birch trees. It was Mother Wolf. She was going to speak for her foster child, and not let Sneaky introduce him. She trotted to the front, and swung around to face the pack an instant, and then turned to the council rock again.

"O Black Wolf, mighty leader of our pack," she began, "I have another child, which I have nursed and brought up in my den, and I wish to admit him to the pack. A foster child brought to me one day by Sneaky. I have cared for him and loved him as my own. I have taught him the ways of our people, and with us he must hunt, for his own people have cast him out."

All the wolves pricked up their ears at this strange announcement, and Black Wolf half rose from his sitting attitude; but his eyes had narrowed and darkened, for he knew from what Sneaky had told him that this thing might occur.

"O Mother Wolf, you have spoken well, but we must see this foster child of yours,"

he said. "Is he a wolf cub from another pack?"

"What matters it if he's from another pack or no pack at all?" replied Mother Wolf. "A mother's love is great enough to take to herself any child that is homeless and friendless. Is it not on record that long ago a Mother Wolf nursed and brought up a man child, giving to him as much as she gave to her own offsprings? Then, if she can adopt a man child, why can she not take the offspring of any other animal of the woods—of Puma the Mountain Lion, for instance, or—"

"Puma's offspring would bring disaster to us if we adopted him," replied Black Wolf hastily, and the others shuddered at the mere mention of Puma's name. "No, we could never admit a Puma as a member of the hunting pack."

"No! No!" cried many voices.

They jumped to their feet, ready to enforce their protest by actions. A young Puma would stand little chance in that company of angry wolves.

"It is not Puma's offspring," replied Mother Wolf, smiling. "I could never learn to love anything that came out of Puma's den."

"What animal is it then? Where is this foster child?" several cried.

"You hear them," added Black Wolf. "What have you to say? Where is this one you plead for?"

"He is yonder in the shadow of the birches. I shall call him out if you'll give him protection. If not—"

"He shall be protected," interrupted the leader. "It is the law of the council."

Mother Wolf turned her head ever so slightly, and called: "Little Brother, come here!"

Washer, with his heart beating fast, but confident that Mother Wolf would protect him, emerged slowly from the shadows and trotted toward her. At first the wolves could see nothing, so small was he, and then they could make out only a shadow that seemed to drift between them and the woods. But when Washer reached the foot of the council rock, the bright moonlight fell full upon him.

"Here is my foster child!" exclaimed Mother Wolf proudly. "And my love for him is as great as for my own cubs. He is as wise as they, as brave, and as quick-witted. Look at him, and accept him."

Black Wolf rose to his feet and stared down at Washer. All the other wolves leaped to

their feet and closed in to get a better view. Then suddenly, before their leader could speak, a howl of derision went up from a score of throats.

"A raccoon!" they shouted in merriment. "A raccoon! And he wishes to hunt with the pack!"

For a moment the gale of merriment was so great that no one could be heard. Black Wolf tried to preserve order and his own dignity. Washer felt suddenly abashed and frightened, and wished there was a tree near that he could climb. In the next story the wolf pack try to kill Washer, but Mother Wolf comes to the rescue.

STORY TWELVE

BLACK WOLF DEFIES THE PACK

Mother Wolf was even more annoyed and dismayed than Washer by the sudden outbreak of merriment when the pack caught sight of the raccoon standing before the council rock. Sneaky, from a position behind apparently enjoyed the embarrassment of his mate, for a broad grin spread over his face and he chuckled with the others. The young cubs stood by their father, but as the scene was a little puzzling to them they remained silent and motionless.

"Give me the raccoon for my hunting companion!" shouted a big gray wolf. "I won't go far then for my dinner!"

The others began crowding around the council rock. "No! No! We want him!" they cried. "Turn him over to the pack!"

Mother Wolf swung around and faced the circle of wolves, displaying her teeth and growling angrily.

Black Wolf arose to his hind legs and let out a roar that brought the whole pack to its senses. The cries stopped, and every member slunk back to his position. The big leader

glared hard at them and waited a full minute to see if any dared oppose his authority.

Then he turned slowly to Sneaky, and said: "Sneaky, do you bring this raccoon as your foster child?"

"No, O mighty leader, he is none of mine," was the prompt reply. "I brought him to my den for food one day after I'd fished him out of the river. I wanted to kill him for the children, but Mother Wolf protested. I had nothing to do with his rearing. He would have died long ago if I'd had my way."

The members of the pack nodded their heads, and Black Wolf turned to Mother Wolf. He looked at her in silence for some time. Then, in a low voice, he said: "No foster child can hunt with the pack unless he's a wolf. It's against the law of the woods. If we permitted it Puma the Mountain Lion would be filling our homes with his young so they might grow up with us and destroy us. And Loup the Lynx would do the same so that he could betray our hiding places. There would be no safety for us after that."

"But Little Brother is a raccoon," pleaded Mother Wolf. "Surely you're not afraid of the raccoons. They could not hurt us nor betray us."

The whole pack sniffed in disgust at the

idea of the raccoon tribe hurting the wolves.

"That is true, O Mother Wolf," replied Black Wolf, "but if we let you introduce a raccoon as a foster child, we could not prevent another bringing a young Puma or Lynx. We must obey the laws of our tribe, and keep from it all other animals."

A great sadness settled on Mother Wolf's face. She looked down at Washer and began licking his head. She knew that Black Wolf's words were law, and she could not defy them.

"Then must I give up my foster child?" she asked.

"No," replied the leader, "you can take him home and keep him, but he is not under the protection of the pack. If they hunt him down and kill him you can blame no one. I cannot interfere."

There was a murmur of applause, and every wolf began licking his lips as if in anticipation of the feast ahead. The sight of their cruel greediness aroused Mother Wolf. She raised her head proudly, and said:

"They will not dare touch him in my cave—not one of them! I shall protect him!"

There was an ugly, defiant look in the eyes which made more than one wolf cower and slink back out of sight. Mother Wolf was a big, gaunt, powerful creature, and no one

cared to measure his strength with her when she was defending her young.

"The council is ended then?" she added, turning to the leader. "You refuse to accept Little Brother in the pack?"

"It is so decided, Mother Wolf. And the law cannot be changed."

"Then I shall go home. Come, Little Brother, we must start at once before the moon grows dark. It is a long way, but—"

"One moment!" cried a big gray wolf. "Does the law of the woods give us the right to hunt for our food now? We're hungry, and if the council has ended we may begin the hunt at once. Is it not true, O Black Wolf?"

Now the leader and Mother Wolf both understood the meaning of this challenge. The pack wanted to pounce upon Washer at once and devour him before he could ever reach the cave. Even Washer knew what was coming, and a great trembling seized him. He looked around him, but there was no tree near the council rock, and the whole pack stood between him and the woods. He had no chance to escape them.

Black Wolf seemed troubled by the gray wolf's questions, for he knew that he had no authority to change the law. Once his decision was given there was nothing more for him

to do. The whole pack had a right to fall upon Washer and kill him in sight of Mother Wolf. It was a dangerous situation.

But Mother Wolf suddenly changed her attitude. She backed up against the council rock, with Washer behind her, and bared her white teeth to the pack. The hair stood up straight on her head, and the bushy tail began swishing slowly back and forth. The yellow eyes were so luminous in the moonlight that they seemed to shoot sparks of fire.

"If you're hungry," she growled, "and want to eat Little Brother, you must do so over my dead body. Not one of you shall touch him until you've felt the sting of my teeth. Come on now, Gray Wolf, and I'll show you what mother love can do to save her young!"

Gray Wolf hesitated, backing off a little, for Mother Wolf was a powerful antagonist. Alone he could not overcome her. Indeed, in her present frame of mind, she could probably whip two or three ordinary wolves. She was crouching for the spring, with dripping jaws snapping defiantly.

"Why should we be defied by one wolf!" cried the big gray fellow. "We must have the raccoon. Close in on him on all sides. Sneaky, you lead on that side, and I'll do the same here."

Mother Wolf cast a look at Sneaky that made him hesitate, but at the same time the wolves on the outside of the circle began crowding in. They pushed and shoved until the circle was narrowed. Those in the front came within a few feet of Mother Wolf.

With a growl she snapped at the nearest and caught him by the front paw. With a howl of pain, the wolf leaped over the backs of the others and disappeared in the woods. Mother Wolf sprang at another and sunk her sharp teeth in his neck.

But in spite of all this the circle was growing smaller. The pack was clamoring for the blood of Washer, and it was only a question of time before they would overcome Mother Wolf. She could not hope to fight off the whole pack. She seemed to realize this, but she was determined to die in the defense of her foster child.

"Close in!" cried Gray Wolf. "Come on, Sneaky, do your part, or we'll believe you love the raccoon too."

Now the battle would have ended shortly if something hadn't happened to surprise all. With a roar of rage and challenge, Black Wolf leaped from the top of the rock and landed by the side of Mother Wolf. Facing the pack, he cried:

"Not as your leader, but as one fighting for fair play, I shall defend Mother Wolf. The first one that touches her shall pay with his life. Back now, or fight me!"

There was a moment of silence; then a low murmur of voices as the circle broke and fell back, leaving only Gray Wolf and Sneaky in the front. Finding themselves deserted by the pack, they quickly ran, too, and disappeared in the woods. In the next story Mother Wolf takes Washer to the Silver Birch grove where his people live.

STORY THIRTEEN

WASHER GOES TO THE SILVER BIRCH GROVE

Black Wolf's unexpected defense of Mother Wolf and Washer saved them from what might have been sure death to the latter and serious injury to the former. None of the pack dared to offer battle to their leader, and the moment he sided with Mother Wolf they broke ranks and ran off into the woods.

When they were gone, Mother Wolf turned gratefully to the big leader, and said: "You have saved my life, Black Wolf. What can I do to repay you?"

"Hurry home with your foster child, Mother Wolf, before the pack changes its mind and returns. I will accompany you."

More than ever grateful now for seeing that she got back to her den in safety, Mother Wolf led the way through the woods, with Washer close behind her, and the leader of the pack bringing up the rear. Silently and noiselessly they stole single file through the woods, with eyes and ears alert to catch any unusual sound.

But nothing happened on the way. They reached the cave in safety, where Black Wolf

stopped. "I'll not go in," he said. "Now you're home you'll know how to defend yourself."

"Yes, I can defend my home," she replied. "I'll not need any help now. Thank you a thousand times for helping me."

"I did it, Mother Wolf," replied the leader, "because I remember how we used to play together when young, and because I wanted to see justice done. But now that you've got your foster child home, what are you going to do with him? He can't hunt with the pack, and not being under their protection they will hunt him down and kill him. Wherever he goes they will follow. You can't always stay in the den watching him. You must hunt with the pack at times to get your share of food. If you stay here alone you'll starve."

Mother Wolf looked troubled, and said nothing. She knew how true Black Wolf's words were, and she had not taken them lightly. When he finally left her, she walked into the cave with Washer by her side. It was empty. Sneaky and the cubs had not yet returned.

"They're out hunting, and won't return until morning," she said. "Now, Little Brother, we can find some rest."

But Washer was not anxious for rest—not

in the Wolf's den. He felt that the night's adventure had broken up his old home. There could no longer be any ties to hold him to it. In time the cubs would side with pack and turn upon him.

"I can never stay here," he said suddenly. "If I do I'm in constant danger, and you, too, will be in trouble. The whole pack will turn against you. I must leave."

"But where can you go, Little Brother?" asked Mother Wolf anxiously.

"I must return to my own people."

"But they won't have you. Didn't you say one of them bit you and threatened your life?"

"Yes, but he didn't know me. I must find one of my real brothers, and he will understand."

Mother Wolf sat down and considered. After a while she got up and paced back and forth in the den. "Maybe you're right," she said finally, stopping before him. "There would be nothing but danger here for you, and in time my own children would drive you out and perhaps kill you. Yes, it's better that you should return to your own people. But if they won't have you, I'll still protect you."

Washer rose excitedly to his feet. "Then I must go at once—before the cubs and Sneaky return. They must find me gone, and if you

don't tell them where I am they'll never know."

"That's true, Little Brother. But where shall we go tonight?"

"To the Silver Birch grove where my people live. It's above the falls where I fell in the water. Take me there, and I'll watch and wait for them."

"But suppose some of the wolves found you in the Silver Birch Grove?"

"What matter's that?" laughed Washer. "I can climb a tree which is more than any of the wolves can do. I'll go up the biggest tree, and laugh at them."

"Yes, Little Brother, you can do that. I'd forgotten that your people are tree climbers. Well," sighing heavily, "it's the only thing to do, but it makes me sad to lose you. I shall mourn you every day you're away."

"Not more than if you saw me killed by your own people," added Washer, smiling up into her face.

She nodded her head and began licking his fur. In a short time she was ready to accompany him to the grove of Silver Birches. This was some distance from the cave, and they had to be wary in their movements, for the whole wolf pack was abroad on the hunt. They heard their distant howls on the clear

night air, but by keeping away from them they soon got beyond their echo.

They trotted along through the moonlight, following the river toward the falls. Just below them they stopped, while Washer pointed out where Sneaky had found him when he jumped ashore from his raft.

"That must have been a terrible adventure, Little Brother," Mother Wolf said. "I never heard of any animal coming over the falls and living. It must be you have a charmed life."

"If so it's because I've had such a good foster mother," replied Washer. "You saved me from Sneaky, and tonight you saved me from the pack. You're as brave as you are kind and loving. I shall never forget you."

Mother Wolf was greatly affected by these words, and she showed her gratitude in her eyes. Once more she slicked down the soft fur of her foster child and murmured gentle words of love. Then they started off once more on their journey.

They climbed the steep rocks that led to the upper part of the falls, and once on their summit they headed directly for the grove of Silver Birches. In the soft moonlight the birches glistened and shone like twinkling stars, the leaves showing white and silvery. It was almost like a fairy scene, and Washer

raised his head in delight. He was near his original home, in the land of his own people, and his little heart beat with excitement.

What would his own people do? Would they receive him or drive him away? The very thought of this made him shiver. He would then be without a home or country of his own. He would be an outcast, which is the worst thing that can be said of man or animal.

"I shall wait here in this big birch until some of my people appear," Washer said when they stole silently under the shadow of the grove. "I am safe here. I shall climb up in that crotch and sleep until morning. No wolf can get me."

"No, not even Black Wolf could reach you up there. None of my people could jump that high. Are you quite sure you can climb that high?"

"I'll show you," laughed Washer. "You never saw me climb a tree before."

He wanted to show her how well he could run up the tree, and he was proud of his accomplishment when she watched him in silence, and then said: "Wonderful, Little Brother! I wish my cubs could do as well. Now, if you're safe I'll go. Good-bye!"

Washer waved a paw to her until she had



WASHER WAVED A PAW AT HER

disappeared from sight, and then with a sigh of contentment he curled up in a round ball and went to sleep. He was very tired after the night's adventure, and was glad to get a few hours of sleep before morning dawned. He was safe from the wolves. In the morning he would see if he was safe among his own people. In the next story Washer meets an enemy that can climb trees.

STORY FOURTEEN

WASHER IS TREED BY STRANGERS

Now Washer had not been sleeping long, although it seemed a great while to him, when a peculiar rustling noise below awakened him. With one eye still closed, and the other only half opened, he called sleepily:

"Is that you, Mother Wolf?"

There was no answer, and Washer opened both eyes. If it was Mother Wolf who had made the rustling sound, she would have answered his question immediately. Washer concluded that it was somebody else. Then he thought of the cubs. It would be like them not to answer, but try to steal upon him to give him a fright.

"I know you're down there, Brothers," he added. "You can't frighten me. I'm up the tree, and no wolf can climb up here."

There was still no response, and the silence of the woods suddenly made Washer a little afraid. He became wide awake. He remembered now what had happened to him; how he had been rejected by the wolves, and how Mother Wolf had brought him to the grove of Silver Birches to find his own people.

He also remembered that the wolf pack had declared they would hunt him down and kill him. They were thirsting for his blood, and now that Mother Wolf had left him they had followed his tracks and treed him.

Yes, down below there were undoubtedly many of the wolves—the whole pack for all he knew—and the moment he came down they would pounce upon him. Washer shivered, and crawled to a higher crotch. The moon had gone down, and the woods were wrapped in darkness. It was impossible for him to see anything below; but the thought that wolves could not climb trees brought a sense of security. He was safe there from Sneaky, Gray Wolf and the whole pack.

He waited a long time for a repetition of the noise, and then decided that he would resume his sleep. If the wolves couldn't climb the tree what was the use of worrying about them? He closed his eyes with a sigh of relief.

Then came the rustling noise again—this time much nearer the trunk of the tree. It came nearer, and finally reached the tree itself. There was a slight jar that made the leaves tremble. Washer thought it was a wolf leaping up, trying to reach the lower branches;

but it was followed by a steady rustling, scraping noise that puzzled him.

For a long time he was uncertain what to make of it, but when it came nearer and nearer, and finally seemed to be in the tree itself, he grew terribly frightened. Somebody or something was climbing the tree!

When Washer made this discovery his alarm was genuine. With a little squeak of fear he ran to the top branch of the tree. But the scraping, rustling noise followed him. It first came from the lower branches; then from the middle ones, and now it was approaching the top.

Washer strained his eyes in the darkness to see this unknown creature that was slowly crawling toward him. In time he could make out a dark form; then another and another. There were three creatures climbing the tree!

Washer's terror reached a climax. He ran so far out on a branch that it threatened to break with him. He was panic-stricken! It would not have been at all surprising if he had lost his hold and fallen to the ground below. There was no other tree near enough for him to reach, and it was either a matter of holding on and fighting his enemies up there among the top-most branches or dropping to the ground thirty feet below.

"Who is that?" he demanded between chattering teeth.

Then in a little panicky voice he added: "If you don't get away I'll call Mother Wolf, and she'll eat you up."

That threat had the effect of loosening the tongue of one of the animals, for a voice said in a low growl: "Hear him! Didn't I tell you he was a friend of the wolves? Now he's going to call them to kill us. But wolves can't climb trees. Come on, we'll catch him! He can't get away!"

Now Washer recognized that voice at once. It was that of the raccoon he had saved from the cubs, and who in return for his kindness had bitten him. In some way he had discovered Washer's presence in the tree, and had summoned his friends to kill him. For a moment Washer was more afraid of his own people than of the wolves. Then he decided he would make matters plain to them.

"Please don't come any further," he said in a shaking voice. "You just listen to me. I'm not going to hurt you."

"Listen to that!" sniffed the big raccoon. "He promises not to hurt us. Well, I don't think we'll give him a chance. But we'll hurt you."

"But why do you want to hurt me?" asked Washer.

"Because you're a friend of the wolves, and you're sent here to betray us to them. We saw you come in the grove of Silver Birches with a big wolf, and then say farewell to her. We knew it was all a trap. You nearly had me killed that day when—"

"No, no," interrupted Washer, "I saved your life when the cubs had you treed. If it hadn't been for me they'd caught you."

"No wolf can catch me when I'm up a tree," growled the raccoon.

"No, but they would have watched and waited at the foot of the tree until you were starved out," replied Washer. "You don't know how patient a wolf can be."

"I don't, eh?" snapped the raccoon. "I was treed by one once, and he kept me there for nearly a week, but he got hungry before I did and went away."

"What are you going to do to me?" Washer asked more interested in this question than what happened to the big raccoon one day.

"We're going to punish you, and then drive you back to your friends—the wolves."

"The wolves are not my friends any more," pleaded Washer.

"Wasn't that wolf who came here with you a friend?"

"Why, yes, that was Mother Wolf," stammered Washer.

"What did I tell you?" cried the big raccoon. "He admits it. If you're a friend of a wolf you're the enemy to all raccoons."

"No!" interrupted Washer. "Let me explain!"

"Now we've got him!" interrupted the raccoon, who had been creeping nearer. "Shake him off the branch! If the fall doesn't kill him our people will catch him. He can't escape.

The three raccoons sprang toward the swaying branch and began shaking it. Washer clung to it desperately, and it was impossible to dislodge him.

"Bite it! Gnaw it off!" cried the leader of the raccoons."

To Washer's horror, they began biting and gnawing at the branch, which soon sagged lower and lower. It snapped under his weight and the next moment broke off close to the trunk. Washer felt himself going down, down, down!

He let out a little squeak of fear as he felt himself falling through space. His head

struck a lower branch, and his feet got entangled in a few small twigs, but they could not check his fall. He went down, down, down until he landed with a loud plump on the soft earth. When he got up to run he found himself surrounded by a circle of raccoons, each one swishing his tail and gnashing his teeth. In the next story Washer saves his people from a terrible death.

STORY FIFTEEN

THE CUBS LISTEN TO WASHER'S PLEA

Washer was severely bruised by his fall from the tree, but fortunately no bones were broken. He limped a little, and felt a peculiar sensation in one of his front paws; but these small pains were nothing to the fear that possessed him when he saw the angry circle of raccoons.

They were facing him on all sides so there was no chance for him to escape. He turned around several times to find an opening, but his only hope was to jump over the backs of his enemies, which was something he felt unequal to. Even so they would catch him, for he could not expect to jump higher in the air than the others.

He felt the best way out of the difficulty was not to fight, but to stand his ground and try to explain. "Wait!" he cried in a trembly voice. "Please do not touch me until you've listened to my story. I'm a raccoon myself, and I've come—"

"Don't listen to him!" cried the big raccoon up the tree. "Catch him and bite him!"

There was a sound of gnashing teeth all around which made Washer shiver. One of the raccoons sprang forward and snapped at his tail.

"I'm your friend!" cried Washer, drawing his tail up under him.

"He's a friend of the wolves!" shouted the one from the branches of the tree. "Don't believe him! He came here with a wolf, and he said the wolf was his friend. Therefore, he's no friend of the raccoons."

"No! No!" cried several. "He deserves death."

Washer knew they would not listen to him. They were so excited that in their anger they might kill him before he could tell his story. Clearly then he had to make a desperate effort to escape. If Mother Wolf was only near, she would protect him. In his desperation, he cried:

"O, Mother Wolf, help me! Help me!"

"Listen to him!" said several. "He's calling to the wolves to help him. Now we know he's a traitor."

And with that they made a rush for him. They all seemed to spring forward at once. Instead of trying to leap over their heads, Washer ducked down low as if to hide.

This was the only thing that saved him. The

circle of raccoons springing toward a common center came together with a plump, and some of them were knocked over by their own weight. They bit and scratched at each other, supposing that they had Washer, and before they could recover from their surprise Washer was crawling stealthily between their legs to the outskirts of the crowd. No one noticed him until he was clear of the mass of wriggling, fighting animals.

Washer started on a run for the woods, hoping to get away in the darkness and hide. But the big raccoon dropping out of the tree saw him, and started in pursuit.

"There he goes!" he shouted. "Don't let him escape! Run after him!"

In a few moments the whole colony of raccoons were after him. Now Washer felt he had an even chance in a race to escape. His long training with the wolf cubs had taught him to run with great speed. The way he stretched his legs made even the big raccoon wonder if he could ever overtake him.

Out of the grove of Silver Birches he ran, and when he reached the thick woods beyond he plunged desperately into them. Big trees were all around him, but he dared not climb one, for his pursuers would then corner him.

They could climb trees as well as he. No, he had to escape by running and hiding.

The race was going to be a long one, for Washer was fleet of foot and strong of muscle, and he was running for his life. But his pursuers were equally determined to catch him, and they came after him in a straggling line, the bigger and stronger ones leading the way. Gradually the weaker ones were left behind, and not more than half a dozen were in sight.

Suddenly Washer came to a clearing in the woods. In the center of this was a pile of rocks. The thought that he might find a hole under them where he could hide induced him to leave the woods and cross the open space.

But the pursuing raccoons saw him, and ran pell mell into the opening. Washer reached the rocks first, but to his dismay there was no hole under them—not even a tiny crevice in which he could hide. It looked as if the race was ended, and he was cornered. In a last desperate effort he scrambled on top of the rocks, and waited.

The other raccoons followed him up there, and the leader shouted triumphantly: "Now we've got him!"

Washer squealed as one of them nipped at his tail and another at his front paws. "Please, please—" he began, whimpering with pain.

Now whether it was his cry, or the loud noise made by the scampering raccoons, it is impossible to say, but there were other eyes and ears in the woods that had been drawn to the scene, and Washer's words were hardly out of his mouth before several dark forms shot out of the woods and crossed the open space. At the same moment the hunting cry of the wolf pack startled the raccoons and made them crouch in terror on top of the rock. They forgot Washer, and turned their attention to the wolves.

To their dismay there seemed no chance of escape. The wolves had them surrounded on all sides as they broke from the cover of the bushes on four sides.

That terrible, blood-thirsty hunting cry of the pack terrified the cornered raccoons so they could not move. They flattened down on the rock and waited for the end.

But Washer had recognized the familiar hunting cry. He knew those voices. They came from his own foster brothers—Mother Wolf's cubs. Fortunately Sneaky wasn't with them. Neither was there any other member of the pack.

Washer took courage, and raised himself on the top of the rock. "Brothers," he called as

loudly as he could, "please don't hurt me or any of my people."

The cubs stopped short at the foot of the rock, and looked up. "Why, it's Little Brother!" they cried in a chorus.

"Yes," answered Washer, "I'm up here with my people. When the pack said they would kill me, Mother Wolf and Black Wolf took me home. Then I asked Mother Wolf to bring me back to my people. I knew I couldn't live with the wolves any longer, and Mother Wolf knew she couldn't protect me forever from them. So she said she'd bring me to my own people. I came to Silver Birch grove, and she left me there."

"And you found your people?" asked the cubs.

"Yes, they're here with me now."

"And do they treat you well, Little Brother?" asked the oldest of the cubs. "We thought we heard you crying for help. If they don't treat you well, we'll kill them and eat them. We're very hungry."

"Oh, they're going to treat me well, Brothers," replied Washer. "If you promise to go away, and not hurt them they will treat me well."

The cubs were silent for a moment. Then one of them spoke for all. "If what you say

is true, Little Brother, we won't kill them. We'll go away, and leave them this time."

"Please do," pleaded Washer.

And the cubs, because they loved Little Brother, nodded their heads and trotted off in the woods. In the next story Washer finds his real brothers and mother.

STORY SIXTEEN

WASHER FINDS HIS MOTHER AND BROTHERS

When the wolf cubs had disappeared in the woods, leaving the raccoons in possession of the rock, a long silence followed. Every little ear was strained to catch the slightest sound of a foot-fall, for the raccoons were still suspicious, and were ready for a trap.

But the padded feet of the wolves grew fainter and fainter, and finally died away completely. Slowly then one after another of the raccoons raised his head and sniffed the air. They could tell whether there was any wolf smell near, and if one of the cubs was lying in the bushes near they could detect it.

"You needn't be afraid," Washer said finally. "The cubs never deceived me. They've gone away for good, and there's no danger."

"Why did they do that?" asked one of the raccoons.

"Because I was brought up in the den with them as their brother, and we always played together and loved each other until the wolf pack drove me away. I cannot go back to the den, for the price of death is on my head. I have no friends among them, except Mother

Wolf who raised me, and the cubs, who are too young yet to want to kill me. But in time they will forget their Little Brother, and hunt me like all the others."

"What were you doing in the wolf's den in the first place?" asked one of the raccoons.

"I was lost, and Sneaky picked me up to feed the cubs. He carried me to his cave, but Mother Wolf took pity on me because I was only a baby. She saved me from Sneaky and raised me with her own children."

"Why were you lost when only a baby?" queried another.

"Alas! I fell in the river one day when I was playing with my two brothers, and I was carried over the falls. I couldn't swim, but I clung to a board, and that saved me. I thought I was killed a dozen times, but I wasn't, and below the falls I found a landing on the shore. It was there that Sneaky found me and carried me away to kill for his young."

Now one of the raccoons, who had been listening silently to Washer's words, suddenly jumped to his feet, and ran up and peered into his face. He looked at him so long and intently that Washer was embarrassed.

"How many brothers had you?" he asked.

"Two," replied Washer sadly. "They were both dear to me, but I never saw them again."

"Where was it that you fell in the river?" added the excited raccoon.

"Where the big pine lies in the river just above the falls. It was where mother took us to play on pleasant days."

"What did your mother call you?" went on the speaker excitedly.

"Washer!"

The raccoon who had been asking these questions suddenly sprang toward Washer as if he intended to bite him; but instead of doing that he flung both front paws around his neck and hugged him.

"Don't you know me, Washer?" he cried. "Don't you know your own brother? I was with you that day, and heard you cry. I thought you were joking, and I didn't reply. Then mother heard you, and she ran down to the river just in time to see you go over the falls. You're my long lost brother?"

Washer was so surprised and overcome by this announcement that for a moment he could not speak. Tears of joy started from his eyes.

"You're my own real brother?" he said in awe.

"Yes, see this scar on my paw. You remember how I got it the day I tumbled out of my nest on the rocks?"

"Yes, yes, cried Washer excitedly. "And

you remember how I broke off the tip of my tail. See, it's gone yet. It never grew on again."

"Now, I know you, Washer," added the other, examining the end of the tail. "Of course, you're my long lost brother."

Before the surprised raccoons they began embracing each other. Washer's joy was so great that his heart beat like a trip-hammer. After a while, he asked.

"And my other brother—is he alive?"

"Yes, he was with us, but didn't reach the rock. He's probably hiding up some tree, expecting we'll all be killed by the wolves."

"Then I must go to him, too. I want to see him. And mother—is she still alive?"

"Yes, Washer, she's alive, too, but so old and feeble, she can't hunt with us. We have to carry food home to her. She's never forgiven herself for losing you. She blames herself for letting you fall in the river. It made her whole life sad. I think the joy of seeing you again will make her young again."

"Then I must go to her at once! You will show me the way?"

"Yes, we'll all go now."

It was then that the big raccoon, who had led the others in the chase, and who had driven Washer out of the tree, stepped for-

ward and spoke. He was so big and fierce looking that Washer knew he was the leader of the colony.

"Let me say a word before you go," he interrupted. "If this is Washer I am glad to welcome him home again. But first I want to ask his forgiveness. He's twice saved my life. That day when I was treed by the wolves, and he sent them off until I could escape, I thought it was only a trick to get me out of the tree. I bit him severely and called him a traitor."

"But you didn't understand," interrupted Washer.

"No, I didn't understand. And again tonight when you came into Silver Birch grove, I thought it was a trick to trap us. I saw you had a wolf for a friend, and I thought you intended to trick all of my people. Now, after chasing you, and threatening to kill you, you saved all our lives again by calling off the cubs. That was a noble thing to do, Washer. I shall never forget it—none of us shall ever forget it."

"Why, what else could I do?" stammered Washer. "I couldn't see my own people killed."

"Not if they drove you away and refused to recognize you?" asked the leader.

"No, not if they killed me," replied Washer.

The leader was greatly affected by these words, and his voice trembled a little when he spoke again. "I shall never forget those words, Washer. You have made me your friend forever. Come now, we must go to your mother. I shall tell her the whole story, and it will gladden her heart, and lift the sorrow that has long made it heavy."

You can imagine how happy Washer was to come back to his people and be welcomed by them, but his joy was still greater to find that his old mother was waiting to receive him, and that his two brothers were ready to do anything for him to show their love. And so the great adventure down Rocky Falls ended happily. Mothered by a wolf, Washer had learned ways of hunting that would be of great value to him in the future, and long after he returned to his own people he taught them little tricks that saved many of them from the jaws of the wolf pack. They became so shrewd and wise that the wolves found their hunting so poor that they drew further and further away from the grove of Silver Birches, and life was made happier and happier for the colony of raccoons.

Washer lived a long and useful life in the

woods, and perhaps you will hear more of him and his friends in the book of

“Sandy the Crane.”

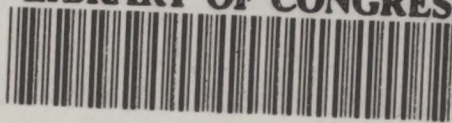
Sandy is the first of the series of “Twilight Bird Stories,” which include interesting adventures of “Scarlet the Ibis,” “Pintail the Wild Duck,” “Plover the Golden,” and “Skinner the Tern.”

If you read one you will want to read all, for all these bird friends of the woods and swamps had many wonderful adventures.

THE END.

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